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SUBJECT: THE GAMBIA: COOPERATION WITH SPAIN ON ILLEGAL MIGRATION

Classified By: AMBASSADOR JOSEPH STAFFORD, REASON 1.4 (B AND D)

AGREEMENT WITH SPAIN TO TACKLE ILLEGAL MIGRATION

¶11. (SBU) Spanish Foreign Minister Moratinos visited Banjul for several hours October 9 to sign a bilateral "framework agreement" aimed at combatting the increasing illegal migration by Gambians to Spain's Canary Islands. In discussion with Ambassador, Spanish diplomat posted TDY in Banjul (Spain has no permanent mission here), Nicolas El Busto, said the accord laid the groundwork for Spanish/Gambian cooperation on illegal migration and included, for example, procedures for repatriation of illegal Gambian migrants from the Canary Islands. He stated that in the accord Madrid provided incentives for Banjul's cooperation, including dols 5 million for yet-to-be determined development projects here and employment opportunities in Spain for legal Gambian migrants. The Spanish diplomat indicated that the agreement was similar to that recently concluded by Madrid elsewhere in the sub-region.

GOTG'S COOPERATION

¶12. (C) El Busto indicated satisfaction with what he portrayed as the GOTG's forthcomingness following conclusion of the agreement. Saying he had expected reluctance by Gambian officials to do their part on the accord's implementation -- e.g. in such sensitive areas as repatriation of illegal Gambian migrants -- the Spanish diplomat stated that in fact Gambian authorities were providing "excellent cooperation." As a case in point, he cited the GOTG's cooperation in arrangements for the October 28 repatriation by air of 144 Gambians from the Canary Islands. In response to query, El Busto said Spanish authorities had estimated that around 2,600 Gambians had illegally reached the Canary Islands during January-August 2006. Noting The Gambia's small population, he judged that illegal migration from this country to Spain was greater in proportional terms than from Senegal and other West African countries.

COMMENT

¶13. (C) Judging from the Spanish diplomat's comments, Madrid offered sufficient incentives under the agreement -- in terms of aid and employment opportunities -- to obtain Banjul's cooperation so far in tackling illegal migration. It remains to be seen, though, whether the GOTG will maintain the current level of cooperation, especially if it means a steady stream of repatriation flights to Banjul bearing frustrated Gambian youths. Meanwhile, agreement or no, would-be Gambian migrants to Spain continue to attempt the perilous voyage; we

note an AFP report that on October 30 the Moroccan navy
intercepted a boat with 108 Gambians off the Western Sahara
en route to the Canary Islands. END COMMENT.

STAFFORD